

fall 2019

vajrabell

*spreading the dharma
keeping sangha connected*

Community, Practice, Ritual and Creativity

‘Cultivating the Riches of Less’

by Saddhavasini

page 06

5 Buddha Mandala to Protect and
Celebrate Dharmadhara

by Danamaya

page 08

‘Unearthing the Buddha’ at Aryaloka

by Suddhayu

page 10

Also:

Drop the Story, page 28

Sangha Connections, page 15

A Whole New View of Meditation Practices, page 23

In Love with the World: One Monk's Journey, page 22



The *Vajra Bell* is an online and print publication featuring articles on the Dharma teachings and practices of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community. It is published by the Aryaloka Buddhist Center in New Market, NH, USA, two to four times a year.

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table of contents

page 06	‘Cultivating the Riches of Less’ <i>by Saddhavasini</i>
page 08	Five Buddha Mandala <i>by Danamaya</i>
page 10	‘Unearthing the Buddha’ <i>by Suddhayu</i>
page 13	sangha profile <i>Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center</i>
page 15	sangha connections
page 19	from the editor
page 20	sangha retreats
page 22	book reviews
page 24	book briefs
page 26	poetry
page 28	‘Drop the Story’ <i>by Bodhipaksa</i>



Community, Practice, Ritual and Creativity

In this issue of the *Vajra Bell*, we are taking an alternative approach to the deep exploration of a particular Dharma topic. Instead, we are looking more closely at what is happening at two sanghas in the US – one on the East Coast – Aryaloka Buddhist Center – and the other on the West Coast – Dharmadhara, the retreat center of the San Francisco Buddhist Center. These three features look at community, practice, ritual and creativity.

— Editor, *Vajra Bell*

..... The shrine room at Dharmadhara features a sunburst design of 76 thin triangular strips of red ponderosa pine.

Photo by Deb Howard

A deck wraps around the Dharmadhara shrine room for walking meditation.

Photo by Prasadachitta



‘Cultivating the Riches of Less’

Building a shrine with a ‘rustic modern take on a cathedral’



Building a shrine room was a long-time dream of Vimalamoksha.

Photo by Prasadachitta



by Saddhavasini
Editor-in-Chief,
Vajra Bell

The local roosters announce the break of dawn. Retreatants silently make their way down the slope to the shrine room. They slip off their shoes on the walkway that wraps around the building overlooking the forest. They step inside and bow to the Buddha who sits at the center of a sunburst of 76 thin triangular strips of red ponderosa pine streaked with pink, blue, gray and yellow.

The scene often is repeated at Dharmadhara, the retreat center of the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC) tucked in the mountains of Kelseyville, Lake County, California, nearly a three-hour drive from San Francisco.

The shrine room that inspires awe in those on retreat was the artistic vision of Vimalamoksha, a Triratna order member ordained in 2013. Moksha, as he is known affectionately by many, hails from Maine and now lives and works in California.

The idea and design for the shrine room came to him while on a month-long retreat at the Jikoji Zen Center in Los Gatos, CA. The new shrine room

is modeled after the one at Jikoji.

Vimalamoksha aspires to live and help others live by his name which means pure liberation. His passion is to provide what he calls “life support” – innovative, affordable housing – so people can spend less time in anxious preoccupation with making money and more time cultivating liberation. He worked with the City of San Francisco to build tiny homes for the homeless until the work got mired in dysfunction and fell apart. Shortly after that, he was on retreat at Jikoji.

“It’s been a long-time dream of mine to build a retreat center,” he says. “While on this retreat, there was this unfolding of memories I had of

what it was like to be a child again – walking barefoot in the woods.” Since the homeless project was not working, he turned his focus to designing and building the shrine room at Dharmadhara.

SFBC purchased the five acres of land with its modest two-bedroom house that is now Dharmadhara (which means Dharma mountain) in 2010. Many community members, including the center co-chairs Padmatara and Danadasa, confessed the place was a mess. Tires, junked-out cars, fallen trees and even an oil tanker littered the property. Suvarnaprabha, a San Francisco order member who, sadly, died in 2013, sensed ghosts there although she was enthusiastic about its potential.

Undeterred, the SFBC community brought in a dumpster and cleaned up the property. “I personally prefer a retreat center with imperfections,” said Viveka, an order member and former chair of the SFBC. Old carpets were pulled out. Trash was cleared. The deck was rebuilt. The transformation work enabled many Sangha members to get involved and contribute.

“There were a lot of work parties to clean up the property,” Vimalamoksha says. “The work projects are a way of getting to know people differently, developing sensitivities to what people are doing and what help they might need. A very natural way to connect with others is to share a collective project.”

Vimalamoksha came up with the shrine room design and started talking to people in the community. “It all culminated in a power point presentation to the SFBC council and the board ... They decided to take the risk of the financial undertaking, and we got started on the project a year ago in May (2018).” Money was raised, spurred in part by a video of the project developed by order member Prasadachitta, now available on YouTube.com.

Vimalamoksha describes the open, expansive design as a “rustic modern take on a cathedral.” The wood used for the building is from rustic raw wood that was milled on the site. “An extensive amount of sweat equity of the community was put into the

building of the shrine,” he says.

The property had more than 80 enormous ponderosa pines that had succumbed to beetle kill infestation. The beetles introduce a fungus into the sapwood that blocks water and nutrient transport within the tree and streaks the wood with blue gray colors. The effect and pattern in each tree are unique.

The community debated how to use the pine. “We were back and forth if we could use this (to build the shrine), or if we would just have firewood for two centuries,” Vimalamoksha says. The wood just would have gone to waste, so the community decided to use the abundant resources on the property.

“Even though it was a tragedy to lose those trees,” he says, “we were able to bring out another beauty of the trees in that death. It’s a very unique connection to the property. All of those boards and the pattern of the wood, they are very much about this place.”

One plane of the shrine building’s roof goes up over another roof creating a vertical space for windows. A central wall with the sunburst pattern, opposite the main door, is about 12 feet wide and 9 feet tall. On either side are windows that wrap around 180 degrees from the wall. The effect is an open, expansive feel with simple clean lines.

“I’ve done a lot of dining tables with similar patterns of what is called sunburst design of thin triangles of wood radiating out from a center,” Vimalamoksha says. “I thought I’d love to do that with a wall pattern and have the diverse array of woods on the property be a part of that. It’s also a bit of a nod to thangkas and artwork of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that show radiating patterns of color and light ... it exceeded my expectations as it came into being.”

Vimalamoksha came to Triratna and the SFBC 18 years ago on his 25th birthday, looking for clarity and direction in his life. He soon got involved in the community and quit his day job as an IT professional in a law firm. He started doing handy work for people before getting an apprenticeship in a cabinetry

shop. Since then he has refined his woodworking artistry doing high-end cabinetry and furniture.

After being ordained in Triratna in Spain six years ago, he came back and started his own business, Moksha Designs: www.mokshadesigns.net, to work on projects that align with his aesthetics and values. His development goals are to design and construct sustainable, affordable and beautiful dwellings to provide spaces for “people to cultivate the riches of less.”

“I had to do something radical,” he says. Starting his own business also gave him more space for his practice, particularly what he calls his “daydream” practice. Without the demands of a 9-to-5 job, he is free to get up in the morning, have his coffee and stare into space for an hour or two. He says, “I’m thinking loosely and with a lot of space in it without intention for anything specific to emerge, a very receptive mode.” He adds, “space and time are increasingly scarce in our world. More and more I feel that is critical to our spiritual and personal development.”

Vimalamoksha moved up to Dharmadhara to take on the shrine project, thinking he would like to stay. Within two months, it was clear, he says, that living on the land in that community, doing this type of work, was what he wanted to do. He now lives near Dharmadhara in a co-housing project with others from SFBC.

He often works with Padmatara, supporting retreats at Dharmadhara. When there on retreat, he is free to enjoy the center like others, walking silently down the slope to the shrine room, taking his shoes off on the walkway and stepping inside to bow to the Buddha.

Five Buddha Mandala

A creative project to protect and celebrate Dharmadhara



by Danamaya

Danamaya, an order member with the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC), created a Five Buddha Mandala for the grounds of

Dharmadhara, SFBC's retreat center nearly three hours out of San Francisco. She was ordained at il Convento in Italy in 2002. This is her story of the creation and installation of the mandala.

The idea to create a five Buddha mandala at Dharmadhara came to me soon after I first saw the property about eight years ago. SFBC purchased the property in 2010. We had started the lengthy clean-up and rehab of the small house and the surrounding five acres. We knew little of the story behind the decline of the family who had lived there and how they lost the house; we just knew it was a sad situation. Broken glass was everywhere along with abandoned vehicles and open containers of unidentified hydrocarbons. The rank smells of decades of tobacco and animal wastes inside the house made us wonder what kind of realm had manifested here.

During the first year, I realized we were trying to build a Buddha-land here. The property needed more than the ordinary, mundane cleaning and purifying; it needed some ritual and symbolic action. At the start of retreats in the Triratna Buddhist community and order, we begin with a ceremony invoking the Buddha and Bodhisattvas and dedicating the retreat to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. If we are in a place where we have not practiced before, we also dedicate the new space to our practice for the benefit of all beings. The ceremony usually takes place inside where we meditate.

A Buddha-land, though, goes beyond a dedicated meditation hall. Every square inch of the property's five acres can be transformed by the *viriya* (energy), *saddha* (faith) and beauty of everyone who dwells there for whatever time they are there. So many beings already live there, both "seen and unseen," as in the words of the Ratana Sutta – a powerful blessing for protection – who contribute their energies to the vibrancy you can feel when you are quiet enough.

When Padmasambhava, a legendary Indian Buddhist mystic, went to Tibet, he recruited the demons that were disturbing the establishment of Buddhism there into the service of the Dharma. I do not think we have demons at Dharmadhara, although I and others have certainly sensed disturbed and woeful energies, at least at the beginning. But they, and all beings, need to be honored and tended to all the time, not just at the start of a retreat. Mandalas delineate a field of influence, and a mandala of the five archetypal Buddhas was perfect for this.

Initially, I wanted to put up something quick and easy. I got cotton fabric of the five Jina colors and transferred designs of the appropriate Buddhas – Akshobya (blue), Ratnasambhava (yellow), Amitabha (red), Amoghasiddhi (green) and Vairocana (white) – onto them. I sewed the fabric onto bamboo garden hoops and planted them around the perimeter of the property in the four cardinal directions (east, south, west and north) with Vairocana approximately in the center. Prasadachitta, a fellow SFBC order member, and I went around and chanted the Ratana Sutta and made offerings. The Buddha hoops stayed up for almost six years, although with time, the elements and the clearing we did on the property, some of them were lost.

Earlier this year, I set out to make shrines that would withstand the elements better over time. My plan was to engrave line drawings of the Buddhas onto pieces of durable California redwood, paint them in the appropriate colors, and then mount them onto iron stakes around the property.

Engraving the Buddha images onto the wood was quite an adventure – a satisfying and enjoyable one – for me with little formal training in woodworking or art. When creating art, I often feel like I am "flying by the seat of my pants." I have ideas, and they usually work out. But if I get into trouble, I just find a way through to a fix. Anyone who creates has this happen. Trouble and fixes come with the territory, and they lead you to places you would never imagine.

The creative process had several rich threads of meditative experience. Working with wood is a serene practice of appreciating all its qualities. Redwood is warm and solid; the emerging grain blooms under the auspices of ever finer grained sandpaper. While engraving the images, I had to work with mindful focus as the engraver proceeded at different angles through the alternating hard and soft parts of the grain.

I used a battery-driven Dremel tool that comes with different attachments; the tool looks like a giant's pen. How hot that tool would get! I had to wear a bike glove and use a potholder. Each color of the grain bled through all the colors except for the blue. Most images needed many paint layers, and all needed several coats of varnish to protect them.

But I was pleased with the results.

The next step was to find the right sites on the land – another puzzle, given the terrain and pathways through the trees and bushes. With the odd outline of the property, I am



not sure I could map the locations we settled upon. Perhaps it is best that people discover them as they walk the land.

Vimalamoksha, another SFBC fellow order member, helped me drive the metal stakes and mount the Jina panels. At each location, we chanted the Jina's mantra three times. A few weeks later at the women's training for ordination retreat in April this year, we walked to each shrine, chanted the Ratana Sutta and the Jina's mantra and offered wild bird seed. We started with Akshobya in the east and ended with Vairocana in the center. When we were done, it felt like we had truly invoked the Buddhas and recruited all the beings of Dharmadhara to protect and celebrate what we are making here.

As time goes on, I plan to do more work on the shrines, clearing the ground around them, pruning the surrounding bushes, and eventually building a bench at each Jina shrine – a quiet spot for reflection under the beneficent and compassionate regard of the Buddhas.

Danamaya engraved the five Buddhas – Akshobya (blue), Ratnasambhava (yellow), Amitabha (red), Amoghasiddhi (green) and Vairocana (white) – onto ponderosa pine.

Photos by Danamaya



‘Unearthing the Buddha’

With ritual and ceremony, a rupa finds a home at Aryaloka



by Siddhayan
Aryaloka Center
Manager

The Aryaloka Buddhist Center in Newmarket, NH, has long been a place where imagination meets

landscape and structure. Aryaloka’s two domes have an impact upon first sight, and even more so upon further exploration when one enters the round and echoing shrine room at the top.

Next door, a large blue barn, known as Akashaloka, stands out as a four-story structure, curiously traditional and unique at the same time. A small, nearly hidden solitary cabin along the bank of the Piscassic River that runs through the property draws one’s attention with its silence. A large, stone stupa, central to Aryaloka’s landscape, has a deep impact whether one understands its symbolism or not. The strangeness of the stupa is more remarkable as one studies the symbolism and myths that it embodies, or even if one just circumambulates it with incense wafting and birdsong in the air.

Aryaloka once housed a residential men’s community, and I lived there for eight years between 1994 and 2002. We meditated together, shared the cooking and cleaning, and had a weekly gathering to check in and engage in Dharma practice. Some of us worked at Aryaloka; others worked at outside jobs. Communal living was not always easy. The population went up and down, fluctuating between five and nine men. Some mornings all of us were in the shrine room, some mornings only a few. Many of our dinners were delicious; some did not deserve to be on a plate. There were days of happiness and some of discord. Abhirati (the joyous), as

Akashaloka was known then, was not free from samsara. Yet, we made an effort to live in harmony and create something transformative in the midst of American suburbia.

My most powerful memories of that time involve ritual. One winter night we chanted and danced around a frighteningly large bonfire. We just could have burned the wood that needed burning without the chanting and dancing. But being keen to the effects of ritual and the vibe of a good fire, we ritualized the event. The effects of the practice linger in my mind like an eternal ember, acting as a psychic talisman of freedom and transformation.

Several years ago, Aryaloka was gifted four Chinese Buddha statues or rupas by Neil Harvey, a mitra now with the New York City sangha. Neil had only heard of Aryaloka when he called the office at the time to alert whoever answered the phone that there was a large estate sale in North Hampton, NH, that consisted mostly of Chinese antiquities including many Buddhas. Someone from Aryaloka, he said, might want to check them out.

Aryaloka could not afford to purchase any of the rupas, but Neil went home with four of them. Living in New Hampshire at the time, he had developed good connections with Aryaloka and the Portsmouth Buddhist Center sanghas. When he left the area, he generously donated the rupas to Aryaloka. They were transported to the center, placed with much grunting in the lower level of Akashaloka, where they stayed for years.

People who saw the rupas in the barn often wondered what to do with them. They are extraordinarily beautiful, unusually heavy and damaged to one degree or another. Order member Narottama of Maine and Paul Dupre, a mitra and Aryaloka’s facility manager, were

particularly interested in the rupas.

Sometimes when Narottama spent the night at Aryaloka, he would visit the rupas, using a clamp-on shop light like a theater lighting designer, experimenting with atmosphere and effect. He often remarked on how beautiful the faces were, and how they came to life when the light was cast upon them just so. He and Paul talked about where the rupas could go and how to repair and move them.

When planning Aryaloka’s programming for 2019, those of us involved in facilitating men’s Dharma practice events decided to build a program around placing one or more of the rupas on Aryaloka’s property. We knew the installation was a sacred task and decided to do it with mindfulness, reverence and ritual.

Our monthly men’s gatherings led up to a weekend retreat we called “Unearthing the Buddha.” We used the great Dharmic image of emergence into light as a working metaphor in which to install the first rupa. Paul and Narottama coordinated repairs and the move. Paul also built a platform in the center on which to place the rupa and installed special lighting.

The origin, age and iconography of the rupas are unknown. One appears to be a *dakini* (best described as a female tantric deity), another (the largest) is likely Samantabhadra or Maitreya, and a third is a standing Buddha that likely represents Shakyamuni. The rupa we chose to move is a mystery. It has four arms, three visible faces – the flanking faces being wrathful – and expresses the mudra of generosity. The generosity mudra often is associated with the Buddha Ratnasambhava, though the four arms and multiple faces remind one more of Avalokitesvara. The rupa also could be an obscure Bodhisattva figure, more significant to the Chinese temple of its origin.

On the retreat, we used ritual to

build a mandala around the whole project. The ritual was based on Buddhist imagery and also contained elements that could be considered more pagan in nature. Around the stupa, we made offerings to nature's elements and established a traditional mandala of fire, lotuses and vajras. The mandala physically encircled the stupa, although psychically it bordered the entire property. More food and water offerings were carried into the shadow of the nearby wood to be consumed by whatever beings wished them.

We lit a fire in the pit we had constructed on a previous men's practice day and spray-painted a glittering orange and gold *hrih* on

the pit's brick base. *Hrih*, the mantric seed syllable of the Buddha Amitabha whose element is fire, represents great compassion. We burned offerings, chanted, and, of course, toasted vegan marshmallows.

We rolled the rupa from Akashaloka to the foyer in the domes on a two-wheel dolly while we chanted the Avalokitesvara mantra. Using a ramp constructed for the task, we maneuvered the heavy rupa into place. There was an immediate sense of presence. We removed the ramp, adjusted the lighting, then sat beneath the rupa. We chanted the refuges and precepts and meditated. Likely, it had been many years, if not decades, since

the beautiful form was last in the presence of Dharma practice.

Long may the reverberations of mantra be felt within its old stone!

Suddhayu was ordained in 1998 at Guhyaloka Retreat Centre in Spain. He is the center manager of Aryaloka Buddhist Center and chair of the Portsmouth Buddhist Center. He works full time for Dharma initiatives.



Narottama (center) puts the ramp in place to install the rupa while Neil Harvey, who donated the rupa, looks on.

Photo by Suddhayu

The age, iconography and origin of the rupa, installed recently at Aryaloka Buddhist Center, is unknown. The rupa has four arms, three visible faces – the flanking faces being wrathful – and expresses the mudra of generosity.

Photo by Roddy Cole

Part of the mission of the *Vajra Bell* is to connect sangha. We introduce “sangha connections,” replacing what had been “sangha notes.”

Whenever someone reads an issue, we want them to realize that whatever center they are at, they are part of a sangha network that reaches across the US, to Canada and even around the globe – all part of the Triratna Buddhist Community. In each issue, we will profile a sangha and invite sanghas in North America to share their reflections and practices on how they live and study the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

— Editors, *Vajra Bell* and “sangha connections”



sangha profile

*Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center
Keeps people coming back*



by Samatara

The Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center (RMBC), started in January 1991, found its home in a rented space before moving to the home of

Varashuri and Saramati two years later. The two order members built their home with space dedicated to the center. The center moved to its current location in central Missoula in 1996.

As a professor of Asian studies at the University of Montana in Missoula, MT, Saramati introduced many students to the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), now the Triratna Buddhist Community. He led a four-month long university-sponsored study abroad program on "Contemporary Buddhism in South Asia" in 1999 that enabled 15 students, including some practicing with RMBC, to experience first-hand expressions of Buddhist culture and practice in Sri Lanka, India and Nepal. Varashuri, at the time, was working in nutrition and diabetes care and raising their two young boys. She helped run classes and took part in the daily demands of running the center.

In its early days, many order members moved through the center. At one point, 10 order members were active, along with numerous mitras and friends. A men's and a women's community also thrived along with two team-based right livelihood businesses.

Buddhapalita and Varada were instrumental in starting and running the two businesses: Tipu's Tiger Restaurant, which later split into Tipu's Café and Tipu's Tiger (later renamed Tipu's Tiger Deli). Tipu's Café was run by the men, and Tipu's



The Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center sangha was on retreat in May. Participating were (back left to right) Karunakara, Annette Puttkammer, Marta Meengs, Samatara, Jean Carpenter, Camie Foos, Dan Brozozowski, Varada, Tim Skufca, (front left to right) LeAnne McDonald, Carol Matthews, Amy Engkjer and Erica Noble.

Photo by Karunakara

Tiger Deli by the women.

Several retreats were held in the Montana area for several years. These included training for ordination retreats, a regional retreat held at least twice a year with the Seattle, Richland and Vancouver sanghas that fostered a wider and deeper sense of sangha, and two large study retreats call "Nalanda West" that attracted order members and mitras from around the globe.

When I encountered the RMBC in 2001, the center was busy. Something was going on at least four to five nights a week along with retreats, mitra study, chapter meetings and council planning. Dana was in full bloom.

By 2003, the sangha started to change. Almost everyone connected with the center had conventional jobs and families that made team-based right livelihood businesses and community living difficult. Some order members left Missoula for

various reasons, members running the center faced burnout, and many of the university students moved on with their lives. Dedicated mitras took over most activities with lower attendance.

The four-year mitra study program became available from Triratna in 2008 and with that came renewed interest and energy. Since then, five people have been ordained, many have become mitras, and seven are in the ordination training process. Currently, 12 order members are in the area. RMBC offers retreats, albeit on a much smaller scale, and serves the local sangha well with a dedicated core of practitioners.

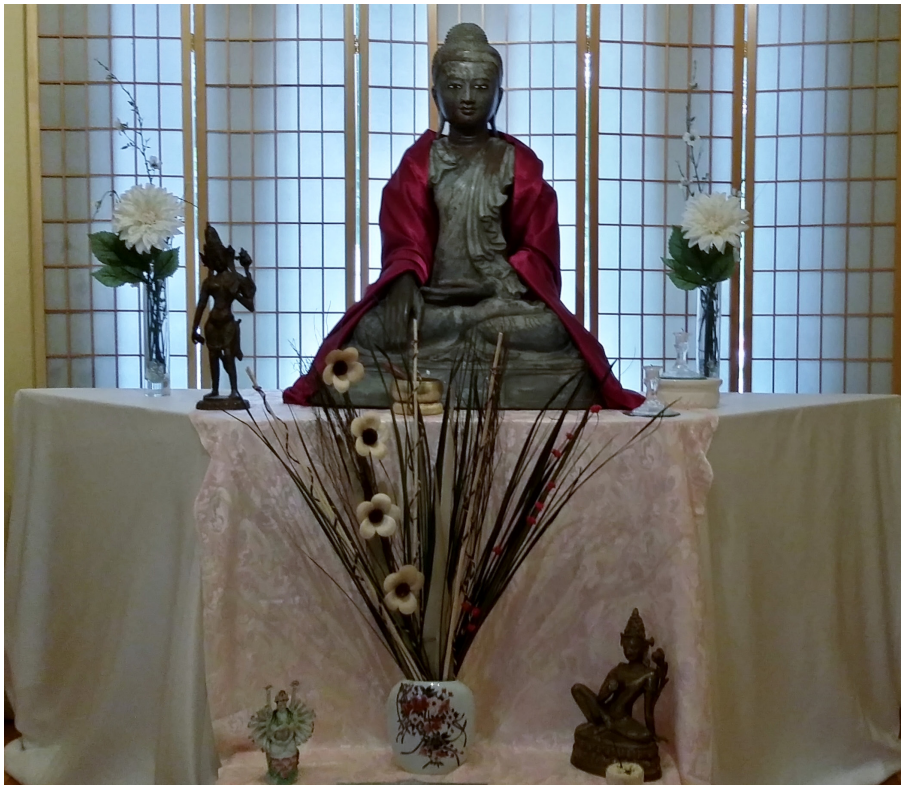
I asked several sangha members: "Why are you involved with the center? What keeps you coming back?" Here are some responses.

Tim Skufca, a mitra training

- continued on page 14

sangha profile

Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center



The shrine in the Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center.

Photo by Samatara

- continued from page 13

for ordination: “There are a myriad of issues and concerns that we face daily. The current American political situation is not very conducive in providing solutions. Community/local involvement is where real progress happens. Triratna Missoula is where the combination of community involvement and spiritual connection are possible. My spiritual practice is supported and deepens as a result of being involved here. GFR (training for ordination) retreats have been quite helpful in this process, but more importantly, (are) the personal connections that are available from all the opportunities being a part of Triratna.”

Loren Dill, a mitra training for ordination: “I have a deep sense of belonging, groundedness, internal peace when engaging at the center.

I love the sangha and, in particular, the women’s GFR (training for ordination) group that I’ve studied with for years. I am so grateful for such an amazing group.”

Marta Meengs, another mitra training for ordination: “I am now involved in the Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center because of the consistent support I receive from my fellow committed Buddhist friends. I also appreciate meeting new folks who come to the inspiring classes that we have at the center. It is always so heartwarming to see how the teachings of the Dharma really change people’s lives, giving them a real meaning and foundation for their life’s direction.

“Twenty years ago, when I first came through that door, I, too, was searching for a deeper meaning and way of handling life’s challenges. The first meditation class I took with Bodhipaksa changed my life and is still

the foundation of my life. My Dharma practice is centered on the values of being an Ecosattva (modern term!). Because of the state of our world and the suffering of so many people and fellow creatures, my practice is in actively trying to change this hurtful system. My Dharma practice is crucial for keeping my heart open, caring and motivated for this activism!”

Samatara came to RMBC in 2001 for a meditation class, became a mitra in 2003 and started the ordination process in 2010. She was ordained in 2016 at Akashavana Retreat Center in Spain. Padmatara, her private preceptor, gave her the name Samatara – which means radiance of equanimity.

sangha connections

ARYALOKA BUDDHIST CENTER (NEW MARKET, NH)

Aryaloka has new center manager

In December 2018, I became center manager of the Aryaloka Buddhist Center. I lived and worked at Aryaloka previously in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is great to be back! My job description is broad and includes program planning and publicity, event organization and volunteer coordination. I am also council chair of the nearby Portsmouth Buddhist Center (PBC).

Aryaloka is located in Newmarket, NH, and is the first Triratna Buddhist center established in the US more than 30 years ago. More than 20 order members live in the area, some of whom teach and participate in activities at Aryaloka and PBC. More

than 40 mitras are involved in the seacoast area of New Hampshire and Maine.

Sangha Nights, held each Tuesday, start with a 40-minute meditation followed by a Dharma presentation and small group discussions. Recent topics have included the symbolism of the Buddhist stupa, how to go deeper in meditation, and how to cultivate inspiration in Dharma practice. Attendance ranges from 15 to 30 on a typical week.

Aryaloka offers a range of activities such as Noble Silence retreats, yoga and meditation weekends, introductory workshops and a variety of Dharma practice days.

Aryaloka also hosts visiting teachers who bring wisdom and experience to our sangha. Recent visitors have included Singhashri and Vajradaka, both of London. Dhammarati from Adhithana Retreat Centre visited in August. Nagabodhi from Stroud, UK, will be here in September, and Aryajaya from Adhithana will be here in October 2019. In 2020, Kamalashila will be here in April, and Yashobodhi in October. Both are from London.

— *Suddhayu*

NAGALOKA BUDDHIST CENTER (PORTLAND, ME)

Nagaloka goes through changes over time

The founding of the Nagaloka Buddhist Center dates back to the late 1980s when Vajramati, a UK order member now living in New York, and other order members from the UK who established the Aryaloka Buddhist Center, also created a sangha in Portland, ME.

In the early 1990s, a small group met weekly in a one-room space in Portland that was subleased from a therapist for \$10 a week. Shrine items, that included a cigar box with a small Buddha enclosed, cushions and mats, were stored in a corner to be pulled out each week and set up for meditation and Dharma discussion. The sangha died out in the late 1990s after Leigh Baker and Dharmasuri became mitras and began attending mitra study at the Aryaloka Buddhist Center instead of leading meditation

and study in Portland.

The sangha was reestablished in April 2002 when UK order member Manapa came and led an introduction to meditation and Buddhism class in the same old space. The Portland sangha has been growing ever since. In 2004, the Portland sangha became The Nagaloka Buddhist Center.

After outgrowing each spiritual home and moving three times, Nagaloka moved in November 2012 to its current location, a brick building in Portland's art district. The center includes a shrine room, a kitchen, two bathrooms, a library/bookstore and an open sitting/greeting area.

Nagaloka has offered many events over the years including weekly meditation sessions, Wednesday Friends' Night, children story-time and pujas, day retreats, periodic

introductory Buddhism and meditation classes and fundraising musical performances.

Today, Nagaloka offers regularly scheduled meditation and Dharma discussions that are run mostly by mitras and friends. The two leading order members, Dharmasuri and Maitrimani, have either stepped down or moved away. Mitra Gail Yahwak will be ordained in Mexico in October. Nagaloka has 14 mitras, five of which are training for ordination. Two other sangha members have asked to become mitras.

— *Dharmasuri*

sangha connections

SEATTLE BUDDHIST CENTER (SEATTLE, WA)

Seattle a lively, friendly community

The Seattle Buddhist Center (SBC), a lively friendly sangha, has been in its North Seattle location since 2009. Taraprabha has been the only active Triratna order member for the last two to three years. Because of this, in part, mitras always have been significant to the vitality and leadership of the center, offering sangha members rich opportunities for creativity and leadership building.

Three mitras were ordained in the last two years: Kerstin Gleim became Amaradhi (she who has immortal wisdom); Helen Rey became Prasadhadhi (she whose wisdom is clear, bright and pure); and Dan Roberts became Karunashanti (he whose peace is through or with

compassion). Jo Wace will be ordained in October in Mexico. Three men and four women currently are active in the ordination training process.

In the past, the center has had a theme for its sangha gatherings over the year. Now the Sunday sangha gatherings, with between 10 and 20 people attending, consist of going deeply into a single topic over several weeks. Each series ends with a puja one week, followed by a week devoted solely to meditation.

At least one mixed mitra group moves along in the four-year mitra study program, led by order members and/or more experienced mitras. SBC also has a long-running, self-led mitra study group for order members and

experienced mitras, those who have finished at least the first year basic mitra study course.

SBC recognizes the value of meditating with others, so the center offers drop-in meditation sessions on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, and a quarterly three-hour intensive session on a weekend morning. Attendance ranges from one to eight people.

Newcomers are invited to Thursday evening drop-in meditation that includes instruction, and a six-week introduction to Buddhism and meditation class offered three times a year.

— Taraprabha

SAN FRANCISCO BUDDHIST CENTER (SAN FRANCISCO, CA)

'Allyship' and climate change focus at SFBC

Over the past year, the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC) has offered more classes geared to newcomers, welcomed a handful of new mitras and enjoyed a steady attendance among core sangha members. SFBC has about 30 mitras and 14 order members.

SFBC offers a January Rainy Season Retreat, where the center is closed to the public to allow the core sangha members to practice in a more focused way. Visiting teachers, over the past few months, have included UK order members Singhashri, Tejananda and Paramabodhi. They offered teachings at weekly sangha nights, as well as led day and residential retreats.

Early this summer, weekly sangha night focused on aspects of practice related to the spirit of Buddhist

Action Month. One of the evenings, "Dharma and Deep Ecology: Turning Toward Climate Change," inspired the formation of a study/action group called the SFBC Green Sangha. The group focuses on practice in the context of climate change and seeks to engage in deep ecology work.

One of the biggest shifts at SFBC over the past year has been asking attendees to include their personal gender pronouns when they introduce themselves at the start of an event. We made this shift to be more welcoming to transgender and non-binary people. The discussion around gender has been productive as awareness and "allyship," a process of building relationships with marginalized individuals or groups, are becoming

normalized in a positive way.

Sangha members continue to cultivate Dharmadhara, our land and retreat center outside of San Francisco. A kula dedicated to tending to the property formed in 2018. Order member Vimalamoksha has built a beautiful shrine room, and exploration has begun into how to add more rooms for overnight guests. Order member Danamaya created a five Buddha mandala on the land as a way to harness natural energy for the benefit of all the beings that call Dharmadhara home.

— Mary Salome

BOSTON SANGHA (BOSTON, MA)

Sangha stable, slowly growing

The Boston Sangha exists thanks to the commitment of two order members, Sunada and Sravaniya, who have been working to build the sangha for nearly two decades. That's since Vajramati, a UK order member who started the sangha, moved to New York in 2001. Since then, three to four generations of the sangha have evolved.

The Boston area is rich with Buddhist centers and places that teach meditation, making it a challenge to build a community. Also, students from the many area colleges who attend are more transient, often moving on after a period of time. Finding affordable rent for space

in the city, too, is difficult. Today's sangha rents a room once a week in the Boston Theosophical Society in Arlington, MA, a Boston suburb. The sangha meets, with an average weekly attendance of eight, without having to offer public classes to pay the rent.

Sunada, who has been leading the sangha for nearly six years, has stabilized the population by inviting students from her Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) classes to join when her classes conclude. Those who join are experienced in meditation and are committed to changing their lives.

Sravaniya rearranged his work schedule last September to participate

regularly in Sangha nights and run the mixed gender mitra study. Having two order members available on sangha nights has been a boost for the sangha.

In the last six years, the sangha has had steady participation. New members join a few times a year, and Cittavan was ordained two years ago. In the last year, three people became mitras, quadrupling the size of the mitra study group.

Even with the ebbs and flows, the sangha is now a stable, slowly growing community with weekly time for meditation, studying and friendship.

— Lisa Lassner

KHANTE OUTREACH (PRISON SANGHAS)

Prison – a sangha of dedicated practitioners

The Concord Men's Prison Sangha was started more than 20 years ago by order member Bodhana as part of the Khante Outreach Program. Khante is a prison outreach program started by the Aryaloka Buddhist Center, and includes sanghas started at the State Prison for Men in Concord, NH; the Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility in Berlin, NH; and a Federal Medical Center in Devens, MA. Order members Satyada and Khemavassika along with Susan DiPietro, Mike Mappes and myself have been the active volunteers in the last few years.

The Concord Sangha meets Saturday mornings and alternate Thursdays. On the other Thursdays, a Zen monk leads meditation at the prison. During our two-hour gatherings, we check in, meditate,

study and discuss a Dharma topic. Once per quarter, we hold a retreat – Friday evening and a Saturday – with an extended, more concentrated time together. The men are interested in exploring, in an upcoming retreat, how monastic life compares with practicing Buddhism in the prison.

The sangha consists of about a dozen men, while attendance typically is half that. Participation varies as some men are released or transferred, while others are connecting with Buddhism for the first time. Most of the men have regular meditation practices and make good use of a library of donated Dharma books available in the prison chapel.

Since I started volunteering, I was surprised by how accessible and kind the men are and how seriously they take their practice. It was quite an

eye-opener to discover that some of them spend more time meditating and studying than I do. Most important, I discovered that these men are in no way different from me. Had I experienced similar conditions to ones they had, I, too, well might be imprisoned.

My experience with the Concord Prison Sangha has been rich, and I have gained more from it than I have put into it. Should you want to volunteer, please contact me perryblass@gmail.com, or Susan DiPietro and Mike Mappes through the Aryaloka office at info@Aryaloka.org.

— Perry Blass

sangha connections

VANCOUVER BUDDHIST CENTRE (BC, CANADA)

Growing sangha offers host of new events

Anne Lavergne was ordained in 2018 in Spain as Viryasati and became the first “home-grown” order member at Vancouver Buddhist Centre (VBC). She joins four other order members at the center. She now leads VBC’s monthly silent practice mornings. The center continues to grow with new friends attending our evening and Sunday morning events. Over the past two years, several mitras have asked for ordination.

In addition to gaining an order member, VBC offered three new events this year: a Wesak celebration, Buddhist Action Month and a solstice camping retreat. All were coordinated, organized and delivered by mitras training for ordination.

Paramita Bannerjee and her team collected flowers donated from local businesses and created a Wesak shrine surrounded by a sea of flowers. Christine Thuring, who has been organizing Buddhist Action Month (BAM!) for the Network of Buddhist

Organizations in the UK since 2016, brought her experience to the VBC. Christine, Satyavasini and mitra Brant Karmen offered a month of events in June that included sangha nights on the theme, a day retreat with visiting UK order member Advayamati, a meditative presence at an anti-pipeline rally and a solstice camping retreat.

The camping retreat at Birkenhead Lake Provincial Park in British Columbia was organized by Christine and Claire Robillard. The small “Birkenhead Buddha-field” or “Solstice Sangha,” featured a joyful and adaptive Dharma program focused on nature-based meditation and mindfulness practices. A group site is reserved for next year’s solstice camping retreat at Golden Ears Provincial Park, also in British Columbia.

— Christine Thuring and Vimalasara



TRIRATNA NYC SANGHA (NEW YORK CITY, NY)

NYC a small, but vibrant, sangha

Triratna New York City (NYC) Sangha, a small but vibrant community, has been a “wandering” sangha for years, relying on a mix of meditation spaces, yoga studios and rental spaces to house its events. Plans are now under way to establish a more stable home base and practice space for the sangha.

Five Triratna NYC Sangha members became mitras in the last year. Upayadhi and Srisara were ordained

last year bringing the total of number order members in the sangha up to six. Both new order members are supporting the sangha and serve on the five-person Triratna NYC council. Srisara is running our monthly practice days and has led some sangha night teachings. Upayadhi, working towards a Masters of Divinity, will be providing the sangha with formalized support as an “intern” this coming year.

Padmadharini and Elaine Smith are closing their Blue Sky Retreat Center in New Jersey. For the past two years, the center has been a resource for the Triratna NYC Sangha. Our council now is making plans so that our regular local retreat schedule can continue.

— Gary Baker

from the editor

Acting 'as if'

Training to be of benefit to others



by Saddhavasini
Editor-in-chief,
Vajra Bell

Buddhism does not have commandments or an overarching moral code. As

Subhadramati so aptly summarizes in the title of her book, Buddhist ethics is *Not About Being Good*, or about not being bad.

Instead, Buddhism teaches that each of us must take individual and personal responsibility for our actions. What we do, say, think – or do not do, say or think – can have either harmful or beneficial consequences for ourselves and others. As Buddhists, we live by training principles – or precepts – in ethics that help us to act in ways that help rather than harm.

Most Buddhists observe the five precepts: abstain from causing harm, from taking the not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech and from taking intoxicants that can muddle the mind. Training in ethics is the foundation of a spiritual life.

I grew up as a “good Catholic girl,” who followed the 10 commandments to the best of my ability, motivated primarily by fear of punishment for being bad. I obeyed my parents, told no lies (for the most part) and did not steal, except the time in kindergarten I took a rosary that did not belong to me. Guilt-ridden, I returned it after lying to my mother that a nun had given it to me.

As a young adult, I ventured into taking intoxicants that clouded my mind and led to less-than-ethical behavior, harmful to me and others. That behavior led me to the 12-step program, my next training in ethics. Like many participants early in the program, I resisted – or I was, as the literature says, “constitutionally

incapable” of – taking responsibility for my actions (there is always someone or something to blame), being totally honest, admitting when I was wrong, making amends and helping others. Whether I was unable or just unwilling, I was told to “fake it ‘til you make it” or “act as if” in practicing these steps.

For many of us in a 12-step program or as Buddhists, these ethical actions do not come naturally. And in many cases, we are not aware of the harm our actions are causing. We have to practice and train in these steps – or precepts – to enable the seeds of ethics and mindfulness to grow. If we act as if or fake it ‘till we make it, over time, acting skillfully becomes more and more natural and effortless for us.

My motivation to follow the 12 steps was not fear, as it was with the 10 commandments. I wanted liberation from feeling bad about myself and to steer my life in a more positive direction. To be of benefit to me, I learned – sometimes slowly – that I had to act in ways that helped others. This was my training ground for Buddhism.

Committing as a Buddhist to practice the five precepts, I thought I was pretty good at being good. But as I explored each precept more deeply, the more training I saw I needed to free myself from the slavery of unhelpful habits, conditioning and ways of being. I examined my intentions, thinking, actions and choices and how they were harmful or of benefit to me and others.

The first precept – not killing or causing harm to other living beings – started for me as an intellectual exercise. This principle is the reason many Buddhists are vegetarian. At first, I acted as if, and did not eat meat. To me, then, hamburger was just red, mushy matter wrapped in cellophane. I did not associate it with

life. But when I read how animals were treated on their path to that wrapped packaged, my intention and behavior changed.

The second precept – not taking the not-given – or stealing, is an obvious way in which I can harm others. But I also can take advantage of people, exploit or manipulate them, or talk too much and take up their time. All these can be seen as ways of taking the not given.

The third precept – avoiding sexual misconduct – essentially means not causing harm to oneself or others in the area of sexual activity. One can do harmful things to oneself and others in romantic and sexual relationships that one would not even consider doing in regular friendships. The positive counterpart is to cultivate contentment with what is, and not about how I would like things to be.

The fourth precept – avoiding false speech – goes beyond simply not telling lies. Speech is the crucial element in our relations with others, and yet, language is a slippery medium. I am a journalist, writer, speaker and editor by training, very mindful of word choice and how that affects meaning and impacts others.

While I was on retreat last spring for three months, Subhadramati, who led the retreat, said that everything we think is an interpretation. That gave me pause. Everything. Everything I, you or others communicate is just another interpretation. I know what I mean (or do I?), but others filter and interpret what I communicate through their views and conditions. I am amazed we are able to communicate anything effectively.

In my speech, I ask not just if I am truthful, but also “Is what I’m saying helpful? Is what I’m saying kind? Is what I’m saying contributing

- continued on page 25

sangha retreats

*Highlights of retreats at Triratna Buddhist centers in US and Canada.
More information and how to register can be found on their websites.*

ARYALOKA BUDDHIST CENTER (NEW MARKET, NH)

www.aryaloka.org

Intensive Noble Silence Retreat November 6-12, 2019

This intensive retreat creates an atmosphere conducive to extended meditation with the fewest external distractions. Retreat participants will have minimal responsibilities during their time here so they can focus completely on their meditation practice. An emphasis on the collective aspect of practice using the five precepts is woven into the fabric of this retreat. This retreat is suitable for people who already have a meditation practice and are looking to deepen their experience.

Yoga and Meditation Weekend December 13-15, 2019

This weekend retreat blends the approaches of yoga and meditation to reach a deeper expression of staying grounded while being open to our changing experience.

Annual Regional Sangha Retreat January 17-20, 2020

A retreat open to all sangha members in the Northeast Region in the US, including from Aryaloka and Portsmouth Buddhist centers, Portland and Lubec, ME.

SAN FRANCISCO BUDDHIST CENTER (SAN FRANCISCO, CA)

www.sfbuddhistcenter.org

Winter Meditation Immersion Retreat at Dharmadhara December 21-28, 2019

“Connecting with the heart and soul of our practice,” our annual winter meditation retreat will be led by Padmadharini. It is an opportunity to take a break from usual distractions and enjoy the many benefits of living and meditating together. Focus this year will be on connecting with the heart, trusting experience, and staying connected and curious about whatever arises. Padmadharini has practiced and taught meditation for many years, and recently completed a two-year training as a hospital chaplain.

Winter Stillness: The Diamond Sutra meditation retreat December 26-31, 2019

The program is a relaxing yet invigorating mix of meditation, silence, ritual and reflection. We will not study the Diamond Sutra, rather we will bring it in to an environment of meditation and reflection. The Diamond Sutra has the capacity to confound the rational mind and our grasping at views, a perfect complement to intensive meditation practice.

VANCOUVER BUDDHIST CENTRE (BC, CANADA)

www.vancouverbuddhistcentre.com

Solstice Camping Retreat at Golden Ears Provincial Park, BC June 19-21, 2020

Join sangha friends for a weekend of nature-based practice at Golden Ears Provincial Park. Our group site will be transformed into a small Buddha-field, in which our “solstice sangha” will live together in close contact with nature. Building on the theme of the solstice and Buddhist Action Month, the weekend will involve meditation, mindfulness practices, “sitting spots,” discussion and ritual.

Pilgrimage to India

Join DharmaJiva tour



Bodhi Gaya is one stop on the pilgrimage.

Photo by Saddhavasini

DharmaJiva offers a unique opportunity for Buddhist travelers to visit historic pilgrimage places like Bodhi Gaya and Sarnath and have an opportunity to meet modern-day Indian Buddhists who are working to re-establish Dharma practice in the Buddha's homeland. A new 21-day tour is being offered February 1-21, 2020, led and organized by Triratna order member Manidhamma of India.

The trip will begin with a pilgrimage to Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar and Shravasti in North India. The second part of the journey will be in Central India to experience the Buddhist Revival with visits to retreat centers, city centers, hostels and clinics. Participants will stay at Nagaloka, a Buddhist training and conference center located in Nagpur, India, and visit the caves at Ajanta which date from the 2nd century BCE to about 480 CE.

The tour is a special way to connect with the 2,500-year-old Buddhist tradition and see how it is changing Indian society today. The fee of \$2,600 covers all expenses including air travel within India, food, hotels and entrance fees. If you have any questions, please contact Viradhamma at viradhamma@gmail.com.

book reviews

In Love with the World

Monk's journey 'guaranteed to open your heart and mind'



by Lilasiddhi

In the dark of night, Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, a pedigreed Dharma prince descended from Tibetan royalty, abbot of three Buddhist monasteries and head of meditation centers throughout the world, sneaks away from his official residence in Bodh Gaya, India, on what he terms his “ego suicide mission.”

Inspired by the Buddha, Tibetan Yogi Milarepa and Mahasiddhas (persons who have achieved spiritual realization), Mingyur Rinpoche is determined to break through the conventions, habits and protections that have shaped and reinforced a fixed identity since he was born. He exchanges his attendants and administrators, robes and ceremonies for the anonymity he had never known but long yearned for.

“Let’s see what happens to my recognition of awareness, see what happens to the virtues of patience and discipline, when no one is watching, when no one even knows who I am; when perhaps I don’t even know who I am,” he writes in his book, *In Love with the World: A Monk’s Journey through the Bardos of Living and Dying*.

In Love with the World is Mingyur Rinpoche’s intimate, candid narrative of his four-year wandering retreat as beggar through India and the Himalayas. Prior to his “escape” he had never, in his privileged 36 years, been without attendants, body guards, clothes, food, high status and residences. Now he must beg for food, sleep on trains and the filthy floors of overcrowded railway stations with the poorest, unclothed, smelly and sick. Mingyur is shocked to realize

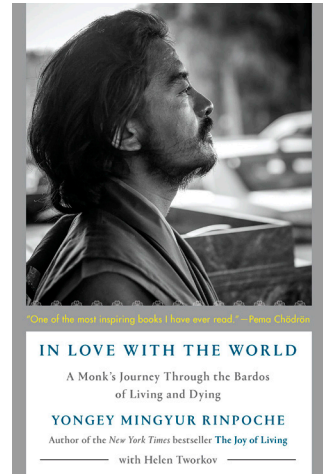
he is filled with revulsion and disgust despite his decades of compassion practice. He suffers doubt, fear and the “dark night of the soul.” He turns repeatedly to the most basic compassion teachings to restore his open heart.

He travels to Kushinagar, the site of the Buddha’s *parinirvana* (nirvana after death), to pay homage. He meditates day and night at the nearby site of the Buddha’s cremation. Without money and desperate for food, Mingyur eats restaurant refuse and contracts food poisoning. For days he experiences high fever, dysentery, vomiting, blackouts and slight recoveries. He accepts, after much spiritual struggle, what he believes will be his inevitable death. He calls on his years of training in the *bardos* (state of existence between transitions) of dying, death and renewal to guide himself through his own death process.

He experiences the dissolution of his body, the relinquishment of the elements of earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness from his body. Great acceptance and peace arrive. Eventually, Mingyur is found unconscious in his own vomit and taken to the hospital where he recovers. His pilgrimage continues for another three years.

Mingyur relates his shifting experiences, reactions and emotions with dexterity. In the midst of his hell realms, he recalls Vajrayana meditative and Dharmic teachings to support his acceptance of conditions and trust in Buddhist practice. His faith is tested and secure. Then he addresses his reader directly, elaborating on the teachings that support him through his many experiences of suffering, ego death, identity death and what he believes is his physical death.

I find Mingyur’s ability to watch the oscillations of his mind, to feel



and report his reactions, to call on apposite teachings to free his heart and mind from their hell states, in real time, astonishing. The granularity of his analyses educates and inspires me. This is what years of dedicated practice can train us to do.

Some of the teachings that support his relinquishing of fixed self, to live with full awareness and avoid succumbing to negative mental states, include: Everything is impermanent. Every transition is a practice of death. Every end initiates renewal, reconfiguration and rebirth, endlessly. Death is not an end, only transformation.

The lessons I personally took from *In Love with the World* include: Slow way down. Look at the granular level, instant by instant. Hide nothing from your heart mind. Do not turn away. Be fearlessly honest. Have faith in the teachings. Burn away delusion. Be freedom.

In Love with the World is a great read, a thriller, an inspiration, a documentary – intimate and candid – of an inspired being determined to pierce through delusion to truth and freedom. Mingyur’s narrative is guaranteed to open your heart and mind.

Lilasiddhi was ordained in 2012. She teaches introductory Buddhism and mitra classes, leads workshops and co-leads Noble Silence retreats at Aryaloka Buddhist Center.

A Whole New View of Meditation Practices



by Satyada

When I was ordained into the Triratna Order, Subhuti's (an order member from the UK) paper, "Initiation into a New Life,"

had listed the Anapanasati Sutta as a potential sadhana practice. Sadhana usually refers to the imagination of a particular Buddha-form and is a practice one takes on when ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order (TBO). Anapanasati means mindfulness of breathing and is a form of Buddhist meditation originally taught by the Buddha.

Subhuti's perspective interested me since I had never considered myself a visualizer, and I had started a daily practice of the Anapanasati a year earlier. So it became my sadhana upon ordination.

Urgyen Sangharakshita, our teacher and the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community (TBC) and order, did not teach much about the practice. However, a lot of my interest in mindfulness had been sparked by one of his first books, *Living with Awareness*, that I had read after coming into contact with what was then the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (now TBC). I come back to *Living with Awareness* time and again, especially for the discussion of the seven factors of enlightenment which are present in the Anapanasati.

About this time, I became aware of the book *Satipaṭṭhāna* by Bikkhu Analayo, a Buddhist monk and meditation teacher. I had a copy of it on my "to read" pile for a long time before picking it up. When I read it, I could not put it down, reading and then re-reading it with intense interest. Where *Living with Awareness*

introduced me to what is involved in mindfulness practice, *Satipaṭṭhāna* was a direct line-by-line introduction to the sutta itself, looking specifically at each of the instructions contained there.

When Analayo's second book of this series, *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*, came out, I immediately read it. In this volume, Analayo adds "flesh to the bones" by including material from the Chinese and other parallels (the same text in a different version) to the Pali sutta. This added depth to the analysis of the sutta offered in the first book.

But for me, the third book in the series, *Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation: A Practice Guide*, is likely to be of the most benefit to me over the long term. I say that even though, honestly, I have not finished reading it. In this book, Analayo offers direct practice guides, putting instructions from the sutta into ways we can work with the material day to day. Here, Analayo's depth of practice shines through. While his scholarship and insight are clearly evident in the first two volumes, in *Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation: A Practice Guide*, I almost feel like he is on the mat next to me. There are recordings, too, available in his own voice, leading the reader through some of the meditations.

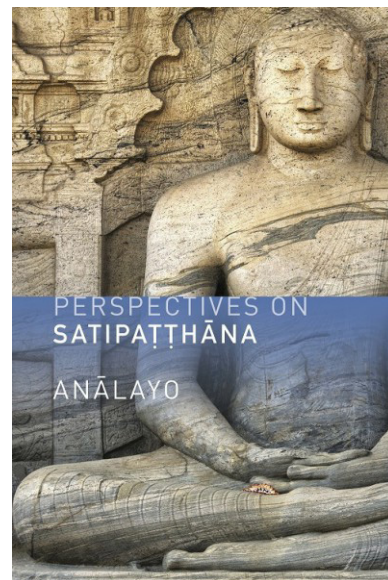
These three books have helped me develop a whole new view on the Satipatthana practice. Reading the sutta on my own left me confused, without sufficient context to appreciate what was there. Sangharakshita, in his way, and Analayo, with his first two volumes in their way, provided me with that context and clarified my view. Analayo's third volume is deepening my appreciation by shifting my intellectual understanding into practical action.

Sangharakshita's *Living with Awareness* always will have a special place in my heart. But Analayo's books

offer further depth into what for me is at the core of my practice. Whether I am practicing Anapanasati or the closely related Satipatthana, I feel like the instructions are coming directly to me from the Buddha Shakyamuni – a flow from an enlightened being into my consciousness helping me to move towards awakening.

Analayo's next book, *Mindfulness of Breathing* – due out in September – is directed at the practice of Anapanasati. I look forward to it.

Satyada was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order at Aryaloka in July 2012. He tries to focus on present moment awareness and the practice of ethics. He has been part of a team teaching the Dharma in prisons for more than 12 years.



book briefs

Free Time! from clock-watching to free-flowing, a Buddhist guide by Vajragupta Staunton

In our fast-moving world many people can feel their time is wound tight, their lives constantly hassled and hectic. In *Free Time!* Vajragupta shows us that investigating our experience of time, and considering our relationship with it, can be deeply and powerfully transformative. He looks at our day-to-day experience of time and applies a variety of Buddhist ideas and teachings in order to understand what time really is. He also offers practical ways of helping us live in a way that is relaxed and open.

“As we know, the Buddha said that experience is shaped by mind; we become what we think,” the author writes. “This is true of everything we experience, even the time that we seem to experience things ‘in!’ The book is exploring the ‘mind made’ nature of experience on a deep and fundamental level. If your time usually feels speedy, bitty, or frothy, then there will be something you are doing with your mind that is creating that sense of time. It will be profoundly affecting the quality of your whole life. It is

an important issue, especially these days. . . My hope is that the book can help people discover how to live more from a sense of time that is deep and flowing.”

The Myth of Meditation: Restoring Imaginal Ground Through Embodied Buddhist Practice

by Paramananda

Paramananda contends that the historical Buddha offered not a panacea for the ills of his time but rather a radically alternative way of living in the world, still as valid today as it was 2,500 years ago. At the very heart of this radical vision is the art of meditation.

Engaging in this art is what Paramananda outlines in *The Myth of Meditation*. Enlivened by his love of both the natural world and poetry, he guides us in a threefold process: grounding meditative experience in

the body, turning towards experience in a kindly and intelligent way, and seeing through to another way of understanding and being in the world.

To buy these books, please visit WindhorsePublications.com

from the editor

- continued from page 19

to harmony?" Being silent or not speaking up when something needs to be said, too, is sometimes a form of harmful and false speech.

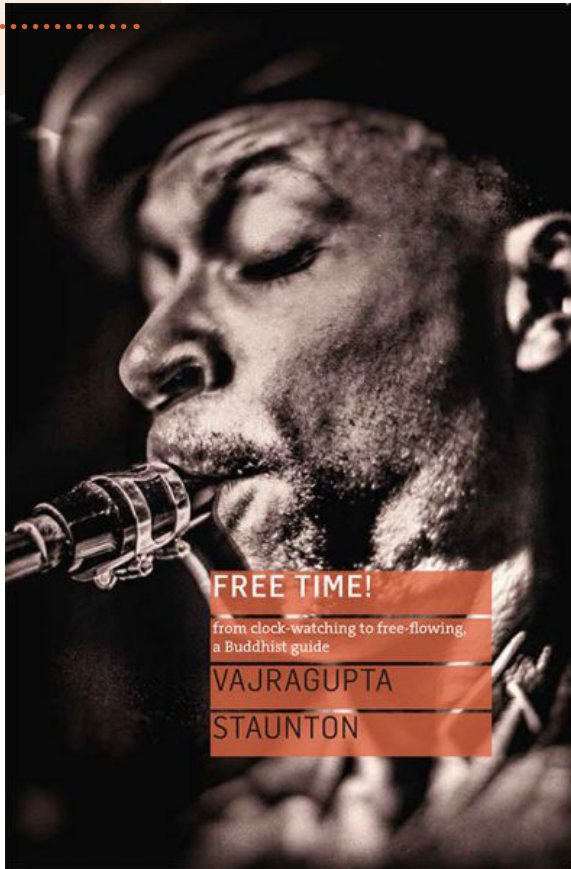
The fifth precept – abstaining from intoxicants that cloud the mind – has been my practice for more than 40 years. So, for me, this precept is more about cultivating clarity and moving away from activities that hinder this. This means abstaining (or at least curtailing while I am “acting as if”) from television bingeing, too much political news, Facebook and other digital distractions. It is easy to turn these off while on retreat, so I practice abstention while at home to experience the benefits of “guarding the senses.”

Why practice ethics? That’s the title of a Triratna Dharma study module. In the 12-step program, the literature outlines the promises of making them a way of life. These include, “We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. . . We will comprehend the word serenity, and we will know peace.”

Even the study module, promises, “If we make ourselves into a larger, more positive and expansive being, then we will experience a deep happiness which does not depend on outer circumstances.”

Living ethically, though, is not just about me knowing peace, which can lead to a self-centered approach to my spiritual life – “it’s all about me feeling good” mentality. Instead, I continue to practice the precepts, because, as the study module also says, “Acting ethically is not just about our own happiness, our own development, or our own mental states. It is about expressing – and therefore strengthening – our sense of interconnectedness and empathy with other beings.”

Therein lies my motivation to continue “acting as if.”



FREE TIME!

from clock-watching to free-flowing,
a Buddhist guide

VAJRAGUPTA

STAUNTON

poetry

On the Late Bus

by Acarasiddhi

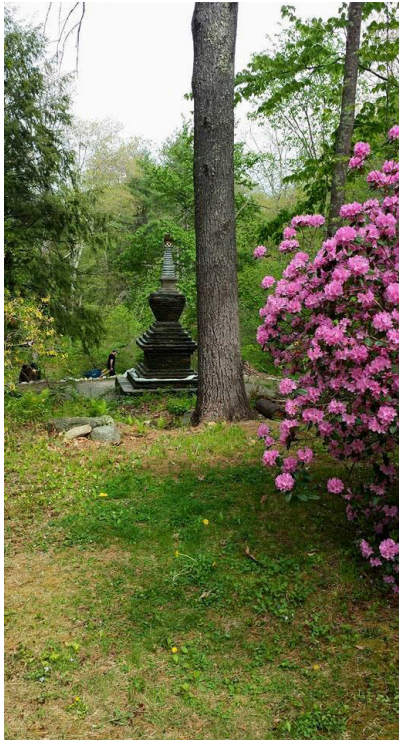
ahead of me
on the late bus to Bristol
the woman leaned her head
upon the rain-smeared window
and surrendered herself to sleep

I was reading,
no, fighting through
a novel an ex had given me
when grace feathered my hands

wisps of a ponytail,
the ends of ten golden inches,
kissed my book-cradling fingers

I held pose
as if meditating

until her awakening



Bhante's Funeral Sesshin

by Ed Rogers

Muted voices
usher respectfully,
while plays a song
of weary wanderers
who return.

Coloured roses
absorb the candlelight
on the Shrine.

Gentle shadows
flicker like moths
over Bhante's photograph,
as if attracted by the flames;
and in the mind's eye
a new journey begins.

Sails fill out with wind
as the boat emerges.
Energies dissipate
over churning waters,
channeling through waves
with a strong sense of purpose,
that in time
may become
almost
effortless.

Present

by Christine Cather

Today I give you
a lifted heart, cooking porridge for breakfast.
The scent of oats floating up my nose and out the window.
Anything more would have been excessive.
Nobody is more contented than me.
All pain that I was delivered from, forgotten.
I am changed, and no longer ashamed of my past.
There is no suffering here.
The porridge is perfect, no more liquid to absorb.

Only Then

by Kavyadrishiti

Often, at best, times come
when there are gifts
that open like apple blossoms,
disturbing nothing.

Only then is there reason
to thank, to hope, to wonder
how I might walk so softly
that the world is quiet.

Often, the music is too loud,
the weather too cold,
so that Hope hides,
praying for spring.

Only then is there reason
to listen for bird sounds,
and for all the beings
who call to each other.



On Retreat – Haikus

by Shir Haberman

Retreat – day 2:
No kale or lentils yet,
But it's still early

Circling the stupa
Always turning one way
Buddhist NASCAR

Golden Buddha
Almost invisible
In the golden woods

Sound of the
Ancient gong
Pulses through the shrine room

I am who I am,
No ifs or ands,
But check with me later

In meditation
My chattering mind
Chatters haiku

7 a.m. meditation
Six people, 1 bathroom;
Morning rush hour

If nothing
Needs doing,
Then do nothing

Autumn sun
Flashes semaphore
Through wind-blown branches

Last night's windstorm
Stripped the maple bare.
I'm almost embarrassed for it

Christmas cactus;
What tells you when
To bloom

Quick! Cross it off
The bucket list;
Sunrise over Newmarket

In my room
A mattress Milarepa
Would not have shunned

First day home
From retreat,
But not really

Drop the Story

Turn attention away from resisting pain



by Bodhipaksa

One of humanity's greatest gifts—our ability to reflect—can also be a curse. Our minds have evolved an extraordinary ability to revisit

past experiences in order that we can learn from them. As part of this learning we often create explanatory stories: This thing happened, and then that thing happened. Maybe they're connected? This ability to reflect and connect cause and effect has allowed us to solve many problems and to develop a culture of literature, psychology, science, and technology. But this storytelling ability also causes us problems, because the stories we create in order to explain our pain can themselves create pain.

A friend hasn't replied promptly to a text message you sent? Surely that means that they don't care about you! The initial disappointment of not receiving a reply may last only a minute or so, but the stories that we create about it can cause further and often more intense pain. Sometimes, in response to a momentary painful event, we can end up stuck in patterns of resentment, worry, and depression that go on for many years.

Our painful stories may be ones in which we blame others, or tell ourselves that the discomfort we're experiencing is unbearable or shouldn't be happening. Our stories can even create entirely illusory threats. We can imagine, for example, elaborate and catastrophic future scenarios that cause deep anxiety. Some of the most elusive yet potent stories concern who we are, and concern our supposed unlikability, or our fundamental lack of goodness.

When we recognize that we are causing ourselves unnecessary pain with these stories, we can choose to

drop them. But this is difficult. We can be utterly taken in by the seeming "rightness" of our stories. I remember one time, when I was managing a retreat center, one of our team members decided to go off and deal with some non-urgent task, making him very late for a meeting that we couldn't hold without him.

While we waited for him to show up, I voiced my opinion that he must see the rest of us as much less important than him, since he was wasting our collective time in such a way. A friend pointed out to me that this wasn't a helpful way to think about things. I repeated my opinion, but in a slightly different way. Again, my friend reminded me that my approach wasn't helpful. But by now my complaining had brought me to the boil, and I really went to town on complaining. I seem to recall that I actually tried to mathematically quantify just how much more important than us our absent colleague considered himself to be. "That's really not helping anyone," my friend said. And finally, I realized that he was right, and that all I was doing was creating stress and conflict. But until that point, I was absolutely convinced by my story.

The reason we cling to our stories and have so much difficulty letting them go, is because on some level we believe that they are true, and useful, and even that they are essential to our well-being. They've evolved as protective mechanisms, after all. Anger evolved as a display of aggression in order to drive away threats. Self-pity makes our suffering visible, so that others can come and offer reassurance. Blaming others protects our sense of self, so that we can believe that they are at fault while we are good and worthy. Worrying focuses our attention on dangers, potentially allowing us to anticipate and avoid problems. Every painful story is trying (although failing) to relieve us of pain.

Our stories are so compelling that even when we recognize they aren't true and that they're causing us pain, we can drop them, only to have them reappear, over and over again. But that's just what happens. It's fine. We just keep letting go of second-arrow thoughts as soon as we're aware they've arisen. Every time we do this, we reduce our commitment to the story, and also reduce, even if just a little, the burden of suffering that we carry.

This use of the word "story" can be misleading. Sometimes our resistance to the first arrow might not be expressed as a verbal thought at all, and might instead take the form of a kind of mental "pushing away." It might even manifest in the body; we tense up as if we were "bracing for impact." But whatever form our resistance takes, it simply adds to our suffering.

And so, whenever you recognize it, drop it. Drop the story. Dropping the story doesn't mean just sitting there doing nothing. It means turning our attention away from resisting pain, and toward mindfully observing our immediate sensory experience. We step out of our heads, and into an awareness of the body, and of the sensations and feelings arising there. And so, this takes us to the next steps in self-compassion, which are taking our awareness toward the pain of the first arrow and offering it our love, support, and encouragement.

This is an excerpt of Bodhipaksa's upcoming book, This Difficult Thing of Being Human: The Art of Self-Compassion to be published by Parallax Press in November. He has written more than a dozen books on meditation and Buddhism, and promotes meditation on his website: WildMind.org